

Monitoring and Documenting Results

**Lessons and Best Practices
From The Field**

Principles for Monitoring and Documenting Goals and Long-term Outcomes

- 1. Keeping track of goals and long-term outcomes is consistent with the monitoring duties articulated in the 2002 Farm Security and Rural Investment Act.

- 2. Monitoring and documenting goals and long term outcomes of council activities is a part of both the strategic planning process and the annual planning process.

Why?

- **May require engaging partners who have the capacity and interest in monitoring outcomes as part of their mission (e.g. higher education, some agencies).**
- **Good information about long term results informs strategic planning.**
- **Monitoring activities need to be built into the annual work-plan.**

Pathfinding Questions

- How do we understand and articulate the role of the council as an initiator of activities that start having results many years out?
- How can we build monitoring activities into our work in a cost and time effective way?
- For how many years should we include monitoring activities for any particular goal?

- When should we apply our limited staff resources to a rigorous effort to monitor and document results and when is less formal monitoring sufficient?
- How do we communicate the results of our activities effectively to a wide range of audiences?
- How can we maintain institutional memory?
- When should the monitoring and evaluation of results be a multi-state effort, supported by the national office?

Some of the Challenges:

- It's hard to do
- Limited resources and expertise
- Limited staff time
- Catch-22 (action orientation versus reflection)
- Many audiences to communicate with
- Staying clear about why.
(is it self-serving, is it education, is it necessary?)
- Knowing when enough is enough

Best Practices

- **Evaluation and activities for monitoring are built into the work-plan and into strategic plans**
- **Using research institutes**
- **Using higher education**
- **Pulling initial work groups together 4-24 months after initiating a council effort to get their information about results**

- **Follow-up phone calls from staff**
- **Using interns to do follow-up phone interviews**
- **Surveys of participants in training activities**
- **Including a monitoring component in the community assessment process**